



CANADIAN
CATTLEMEN'S
ASSOCIATION

National Voice Of Cattle Producers



Western Stock
Growers' Association

A photograph of a herd of cattle in a grassy field. In the foreground, a black and white cow is visible on the left, and a brown and white cow is on the right. The background shows a line of trees under a blue sky with light clouds. A semi-transparent brown rectangle is overlaid in the center, containing the title and date.

Alberta's Beef Industry

June 30, 2021

Organizations



- ☐ Represented by General Manager, **Brad Dubeau**
- ☐ Legislated commission for Alberta's entire beef industry
- ☐ Work on behalf of all sectors of the beef industry and all of Alberta's 18,000 producers
- ☐ Funded by a check-off fee (\$2.00) that is paid every time an animal is sold

Organizations



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National Voice Of Cattle Producers

- ❑ Represented by Manager of Environment and Sustainability, **Larry Thomas**
- ❑ National voice for Canada's 60,000 beef producers, the bulk of whom are in Alberta and Saskatchewan

Organizations



- ❑ Represented by General Manager, **Lindsye Dunbar**
- ❑ Membership organization that has actively represented the interests of all grazing leaseholders since 1998
- ❑ There are roughly 5,700 grazing leases in Alberta, covering an estimated 5.2 million acres (2.1 million hectares)

Organizations



- ❑ Represented by General Manager, **Lindsye Dunbar**
- ❑ Established in 1896, WSGA is the longest running agriculture organization in Alberta
- ❑ Province-wide, voluntary membership represents over half a million head of cattle and three million hectares of rangeland
- ❑ WSGA has a long history of involvement in policy as it pertains to land use and beef industry issues

Beef Production in Canada

- ❑ Of the 3.5 million beef cows in Canada, about 72% are on farms and ranches in Alberta and Saskatchewan
- ❑ The beef industry is Canada's 2nd largest agricultural sector, contributing \$21.8 billion to the national GDP and supporting 350,000 full-time equivalent jobs
- ❑ These family-run operations rely on access to land and water to support their livestock, forage and feed production, and irrigation

Beef Production in Canada

- ❑ To protect these resources for future generations, the Canadian beef industry has set a host of ambitious 2030 goals including promoting and supporting:
 - ❑ Groundwater recharge
 - ❑ Water quality
 - ❑ Soil water retention
 - ❑ Future water supplies
- ❑ Other commitments include managing for healthier landscapes, protecting species at risk, and resilience to drought and flooding.
- ❑ Since 1970, 75% of native grasslands in North America have been lost to conversion and development
- ❑ With those grassland losses, habitat fragmentation has led to over 60 species currently at risk

A photograph of a herd of cattle in a grassy field. In the foreground, a black and white cow is on the left, and a brown and white cow is on the right. A semi-transparent brown rectangle is centered over the image, containing the title text. The background shows a line of trees under a blue sky.

History of Beef Production In Alberta

History of Beef Production in Alberta

- ❑ 1873 – First 12 head of breeding cattle brought to Alberta
- ❑ 1879 – George Emerson and Tom Lynch started the first ranching operation around the Highwood River
- ❑ 1881 – the Canadian Government leased out ranches for up to 100,000 acres, but they had to have at least 1 cow for every 10 acres.
- ❑ 1882 – Alberta's herd grew to over 9,000 head of cattle



Bar U Ranch 1919 – Library and Archives Canada

History of Beef Production in Alberta

- ❑ Simultaneously, the government set cattle stocking rates were found to be much too high
- ❑ The harsh winter of 1886-87 killed a large portion of the Alberta cattle herd that was already weakened from low forage supplies
- ❑ In 1870, the Canadian Government enacted the *Homestead Act*, encouraging settlers to take over the agricultural areas of the province

History of Beef Production in Alberta

- ❑ For homesteaders to take ownership, they needed to grow cereal crops for 4 consecutive years
- ❑ Climatic conditions in southern Alberta were unexpectedly variable, causing over 40% of homesteaders from 1905 – 1930 abandoning the agreement
- ❑ The high risk of bankruptcy led the government to recognize the financial liability of cropping in parts of Alberta



Farming near Calgary 1884 - Alberta's Historic Places

The Beginning of Rangeland Stewardship

- ❑ The government reclaimed massive tracts of land and re-issued them as grazing leases
- ❑ This limited producer ability to intensively crop or overgraze cattle, in order to stabilize profitability and tax revenue
- ❑ The science of range management started to develop at this time
- ❑ Attempts were made to bring in new, “more productive” species of forage, but they failed to thrive in certain areas
- ❑ Ranchers recognized native grass communities were high-quality, climate-resistant forages if managed properly



The Beginning of Rangeland Stewardship

- ❑ As time passed, ranchers started to work more in tune with the native ecosystem
- ❑ Ranchers became skilled at knowing their land and how to properly time grazing to minimize impacts
- ❑ This made ranching a uniquely compatible use for these grasslands
- ❑ The Alberta ranching model provides a similar role to that of the bison that previously roamed the plains



Early Industry Expansion

- ❑ The early 1900s advancements in range management contributed to a stable forage supply for beef producers
- ❑ The relative success of the *Homestead Act* in other areas of the province caused the crop sector to grow
- ❑ Excess from the crop industry could be used for beef production, fueling a fed cattle industry



THE BEEF LIFE CYCLE

COW-CALF

Cows are bred and calves are born and raised every year on cow-calf farms and ranches, spending time grazing on grass pastures within sight of their mothers.

WEANING

Beef calves are weaned away from their mothers between 6-8 months of age.

CALVES
FOR SALE

LIVESTOCK AUCTION MARKETS

Many calves leave the farm or ranch where they were born and are sold at livestock auction markets to stockers and backgrounders between 6-12 months of age.

STOCKERS AND BACKGROUNDERS

Between 6-12 months of age cattle spend time at stocker and backgrounder farms and ranches where they graze on a variety of pastures. Here they gain weight and convert forage and grass into lean protein.

FEEDYARD

Cattle spend 4-6 months at a feedyard being fed a scientifically-balanced diet and receiving daily care. Some spend the rest of their lives on a pasture being grass finished.

PACKING PLANT

Cattle are sent to a packer/processing facility to be slaughtered and processed then distributed to supermarket retailers and restaurants.

Retailers and foodservice operators sell beef in
SUPERMARKETS AND RESTAURANTS.

Beef helps nourish the bodies of
MILLIONS OF AMERICANS
by providing 10 essential nutrients.

Due to strong demand for U.S. beef,
beef is **EXPORTED TO MORE
THAN 130 OTHER COUNTRIES.**

BEEF
Funded by
The Beef Checkoff

Rangeland Stewardship in Alberta

- ❑ Rangeland stewardship is more than just grazing resources. Today, producers aim to steward water and wildlife resources as well.
- ❑ Beef producers rely on mountain streams, ground water, creeks, and rivers to supply cattle drinking water
 - ❑ Cattle grazing in large areas need multiple water sources to best utilize all the landscape. If water is limited, cattle will concentrate around a water source causing ecological damage
 - ❑ To protect sensitive areas around water sources, they are often fenced off and “off-site” water provided via pumps, pipelines, or troughs

Ecological Goods and Services

- ❑ Cattle production provides many ecological goods & services (EG&S) including:
 - ❑ Water purification
 - ❑ Minimizing erosion
 - ❑ Carbon sequestration and storage
 - ❑ Wildlife habitat and biodiversity
 - ❑ Utilization of land that is not suitable for crop production



Ecological Goods and Services

- ❑ If native rangeland is converted to other land uses, up to 50% of the carbon stored in the soil can be released
 - ❑ About 1.5 billion tonnes of carbon is stored in Canada's pastureland
- ❑ Cattle grazing provides habitat for game species such as deer, moose, and antelope, and endangered species, such as sage grouse, burrowing owl, and loggerheaded shrike.
- ❑ Some of these species are reliant on ranching for their habitat needs, and without cattle could become extinct



Ecological Goods & Services

- ❑ For example, a McCown's Longspur needs heavily grazed habitat to survive
- ❑ Greater Sage Grouse need a varied landscape to successfully feed and rear their young
- ❑ Beef producers are the managers of the landscape that provide these habitats
- ❑ Many of these species don't occur in protected parks because those areas do not have grazing pressure that creates and maintains their desired habitats



Grazing Leases

- ❑ Crown land that is leased to an individual rancher to graze and steward
- ❑ The province prescribes an ecologically sustainable stocking rate (number of animals permitted to graze a certain area for a specified period) that the producer uses to ensure their use of the lease does not impact the native ecosystem
- ❑ Grazing leases can be cancelled if the leaseholder is not meeting stewardship requirements



Grazing Leases

- ❑ Ranchers are the stewards of these lands that provide EG&S, while maintaining a profitable business
- ❑ Leaseholders often make significant investments in improving the lease to allow for proper management
- ❑ These include things such as cross fencing to facilitate more even grazing patterns, off-site watering systems, or controlling invasive species
- ❑ A Serecon study found that leaseholders invest upwards of \$70 million dollars annually to steward their crown land.

Current Industry - Alberta

- ❑ About 18,000 producers
- ❑ \$13.6 billion in sales
- ❑ \$4 billion to the provincial GDP
- ❑ Generates 55,125 full-time jobs; every job in the sector creates 2.7 elsewhere in the economy
- ❑ Export reliant: more than 50% of production is exported
- ❑ Vast majority of operations are family owned and operated
- ❑ Average cowherd size: 84 mature cows



Industry Needs

- ❑ Although the beef industry is an economic powerhouse for the province, it also faces challenges
 - ❑ High input costs & regulatory burden
 - ❑ Land use competition – tens of thousands of acres of pastureland are lost annually
 - ❑ Industrial activity without proper reclamation and recreational uses can damage land, introduce invasive species, and reduce forage availability
 - ❑ Water – cattle require fresh, clean water for drinking; high quality water is also critical for growing feed and forage to support cattle when they are not grazing

Coal Policy Considerations

- ❑ We recognize the need for modernization of the 1976 Coal Policy
- ❑ Potential risks to the environmental and economic sustainability of adjacent and downstream beef production need to be heard and carefully considered
- ❑ These impacts need to be considered in context and consultation with other regulations and departmental jurisdictions (e.g., Alberta Environment and Parks); not in isolation under the sole purview of the Ministry of Energy

Coal Policy Considerations

- ❑ There are several considerations that should be considered when developing a new coal policy:
 - ❑ Reclamation risk to native ecosystems, including ability to reclaim if a mining company goes bankrupt; introducing tame species into native ecosystems for reclamation purposes is not ideal
 - ❑ Water quality including selenium and other contaminants associated with mining activity; the ability of current technology to mitigate these impacts is uncertain
 - ❑ Air quality impacts
 - ❑ Land use planning for specific regions (e.g., regional land use plans developed in conjunction with stakeholders)
 - ❑ Land and forage resource access and availability

Questions?

